

Strategy Research Project

Strategic Influence: A Framework to Counter Violent Extremist Ideology

by

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Abstract

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The United States is involved in a global ideological struggle against violent Salafi extremism. In response, both the Bush and Obama Administrations issued counterterrorism strategies that advocated a balanced whole-of-government approach to secure their strategic ends: the defeat of Al Qaida and diminishment of its ideology. Recently, the so called Arab Awakening has created conditions of political uncertainty across the Middle East which has further complicated matters. Unfortunately, the U.S. response has not been balanced, but rather has focused heavily on lethal ways to combat extremism. This paper suggests that in order to achieve an enduring solution, the United States must alter course and focus its efforts against the enemy's center of gravity, its ideology. This paper then suggests a strategic influence framework centered on activities supporting indigenous natural allies and tools of influence to create a competing social movement and ideological narrative. The intended effects are to delegitimize the extremist ideology and fray their network. Only then will the violent extremist lose their ability to influence the Muslim masses and regenerate new recruits.

Strategic Influence: A Framework to Counter Violent Extremist Ideology

We can expect that asymmetric warfare will be the mainstay of the contemporary battlefield for some time. These conflicts will be fundamentally political in nature, and require the application of all elements of national power. Success will be less a matter of imposing one's will and more a function of shaping behavior – of friends, adversaries, and most importantly, the people in between.

—Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, October 2007¹

Background

The United States is once again involved in a global ideological struggle. However, unlike the Cold War, this struggle is not against a peer nation-state rival, but rather against violent non-state actors that do not define themselves by geographic boundaries. Instead, they share a common worldview. First, that the United States and Western powers have oppressed and humiliated Muslims and have attacked Islam; second, Western decadence has corrupted humanity and the social fabric which leads to current world problems; third, Arab and Muslim nations have fallen from the path of “true Islam” by their association with the United States and Western world; and finally, that only through the reintroduction of “true Islam” and strict interpretation of Sharia law as the basis for all political governance will justice be restored, and the community of Muslim believers able to take their rightful place as leaders of the world through the reinstatement of the caliphate.²

Violent extremists, therefore, are actively engaged in a strategic influence effort competing for the popular will of the world's Muslim population. Their ideology is the “glue” for the association of individuals and radical Salafi groups, found worldwide, that use political violence and modern communications technology to spread an extreme interpretation of Islam and achieve their strategic objectives.

The most well-known of these organizations, al-Qaida (AQ), acts in a figurative leadership role for the extremist social movement. Despite the death of Osama bin Laden, AQ and its new leader Ayman al-Zawahiri serve as an intellectual hub whose radical extremist doctrine is echoed by other ideological associates in an attempt to radicalize new members and influence the Muslim masses. Their strategic message is consistent: rid the Middle East of American forces and “corrupt” regional leaders, establish an Islamic caliphate governed by Sharia law; destroy Israel; and engage in open conflict with Shia Islam.³

Zawahiri, however, is not the center of gravity of the extremist movement. His removal, much like in the case of Osama bin Laden, would have very little effect on the overall movement. The extremists operate as a loose network with very few structural ties outside of providing ideological support that enables recruitment and financial contributions.⁴ AQ primarily serves as a “brand” whose enfranchisement of its worldview has enabled violent extremism to metastasize across the globe through the effective use of all forms of media, but most significantly, the internet.⁵

In response, the United States Government, over two presidential administrations, produced national security and counterterrorism strategies that have advocated a balanced, whole-of-government approach to combat the extremists’ efforts. With little substantive modification of strategic ways and means, both the Bush and Obama administrations have sought the defeat of al-Qaida and the marginalization of its ideology as their strategic ends.⁶ The most recent version of the *National Strategy for Counterterrorism* states,

U.S. [counterterrorism] efforts require a multidepartmental [sic] and multinational effort that goes beyond traditional intelligence, military, and

law enforcement functions. We are engaged in a broad, sustained and integrated campaign that harnesses every tool of American power – military, civilian, and the power of our values – together with the concerted effort of our allies, partners, and multilateral institutions.⁷

Unfortunately, the United States Government has not effectively executed its stated strategy. The whole-of-government approach has lagged, and the United States has failed to synthesize the effects of targeted operations against extremist leadership, while supporting indigenous partners and most significantly, it has inadequately competed for dominance in the so-called war of ideas against a regressive and violent ideology.⁸ In fact, the U.S. Government approach has been unbalanced, and has favored direct military or law enforcement action against AQ leadership and their affiliates, to the neglect of other aspects of its strategy. As a result, non-lethal counterterrorism activities have “developed in a haphazard fashion without unitary direction or meaningful substance.”⁹

This paper will examine the prevailing approaches for countering violent extremism and suggest that, alone, they are insufficient to secure U.S. strategic ends. This paper will then offer a strategic influence approach—a framework—to illustrate how the United States and its partners can secure their strategic ends and marginalize violent Salafi ideology by building competing indigenous networks, amplifying their narrative to the unengaged elements of the Muslim population and simultaneously undermining the legitimacy of extremist ideology, and fostering internal conflict within the extremist organizations themselves.

Framing the Environment

Counterterrorism scholar, James J.F. Forest states, “The conceptual battlespace of the twenty-first century is fluid, gray, amorphous and ill-defined arena in which nation-

states and [violent non-state actors] attempt to capture hearts and minds...the main conflict of ideologies is between Western liberal democracy and a salafi-jihadist interpretation of the Qur'an and Islamic caliphate."¹⁰ Recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa with the so-called "Arab Awakening" seem to indicate that he is right, and other scholars agree that this ideological tug-of-war is exactly what is taking place across the region. As one of them stated, "In long years of misrule, virtually every institution of civil society was corrupted or enfeebled by the authorities. The most important exception to this is political Islam."¹¹

Now, in the wake of political turmoil and toppled regimes, Salafi-inspired parties have assumed leading roles, using the electoral ballot in some cases to secure power. "In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood took 38 percent of the seats in the new national assembly, while the hardline [sic] Salafist Al-Nour Party came second with 29 percent."¹² These Salafists are the ideological cousins to the violent extremists and they now feel empowered to impose their strict interpretation of Islam based on the mandate of electoral victory. Meanwhile, their political competitors with secular and democratically liberal ideals remain disorganized and incapable of rallying public opinion for support.¹³ Across North Africa, Islamist parties have also gained influence and the future is uncertain as to how this will affect their domestic and international policies.¹⁴ The "Awakening" has also affected Syria. The open civil war in that country is destabilizing the geopolitical balance with its neighbors as warring factions seek foreign support and bases of operation.

This social upheaval has left U.S. and Western policymakers unsettled. As one scholar has noted,

What was termed the “Arab Spring” was simply the start of a long period of chaos and uncertainty in which anything could happen. The region is being pulled in different directions with very little consensus on the best way to move forward.¹⁵

To the violent Salafi groups, this situation has allowed them to capitalize on the disorganization of state security forces and competing ideological movements. “Well armed militias still control parts of Libya; leading liberal opposition politicians are being assassinated in Tunisia; al-Qaeda remains an existential threat in Yemen; and Egypt faces fresh protests every week.”¹⁶ The extremists are re-energized and view the “Awakening” movement as an opportunity to recapture imprisoned colleagues, gain territorial control and credibility with fellow revolutionaries and now have greater freedom to further organize their operations.¹⁷

Scholars that have studied Salafi-extremist writings on the “Awakening” find that these groups are already revising their goals and hastening their timelines to seize political power. Now with more freedom to operate both clandestinely and openly, the extremists first seek to accelerate the implementation of Sharia law in these societies. In turn, they intend to build power and strengthen their grip on the public through increased proselytization and recruitment, further sway the opinion of the Muslim masses and when needed, use violence to guarantee their succession to power. Eventually, the extremists believe they will have sufficient strength to threaten and topple the more moderate and stable regimes of Jordan, Lebanon and Persian Gulf Arab states.¹⁸ Indeed, one scholar suggests a coming sectarian war across the region as extremist instigate a cycle of violence against Shia Muslims, whom they view as an apostate branch of Islam.¹⁹ This tactic, used in Iraq after the American invasion, very effectively polarized the Muslim sects, creating instability that furthered the extremists’

cause. Hence, the Salafi extremists are likely to spread its use to Syria, and then other Arab countries where significant Shia minorities exist. Their conviction, that once the moderate regimes were overthrown and the caliphate established they would then hold sufficient power to threaten the global economy, thus posing an existential threat to the West.²⁰

Integral to the extremist strategy is the use of modern communications technology which has facilitated the growth and proliferation of the extremist Salafi movement for more than a decade. The internet has allowed these individuals and groups to connect, share ideas, recruit and garner financial and emotional support. Extremist websites and video postings heighten the sense of frustration and grievance against the West, while the ideology offers an alternative future of heavenly martyrdom for some and for others the promise of righteous justice and governance on Earth.²¹

Author and counterterrorism scholar Ken Ballen illustrates this point in his groundbreaking book, *Terrorists in Love: The Real Lives of Islamic Radicals*. Ballen recounts the testimony of former jihadist extremist, and delves into the motivations that led them to join the extremist cause.²² What he found was a surprising diversity among these individuals, diverse in age and locality, but what bound them together was the idea that they could help change the world into an idealized future condition.²³

This idealized future condition is the appeal of the extremist ideology, but also its contradiction. For many in the Middle East, there is pervasive frustration with their governments since the post-colonial era began in the 1960s. “The bankruptcy of secular, autocratic nationalism was evident across the Muslim world by the late 1970s” and has persisted and grown as government corruption, nepotism and inefficiency has

grown.²⁴ In the extremists' view, these circumstances are an extension of the "Western conspiracy to subjugate and humiliate Islam and to steal Muslim treasure and resources."²⁵ The extremists offer an alternative vision, one based on holy and righteous justice on Earth that no man-made system can rival. The violence they commit, therefore, is justified as defensive action against Western exploitation and Middle Eastern regimes complicit in that exploitation. Ultimately, the extremists believe the violence will drive the Muslim masses into two camps, those radicalized and willing to fight for "true Islam" and those apostates that conspire with the West to steal Muslim wealth.²⁶

The contradiction, however, is that the extremists champion martyrdom over life, and offer a vision of the future that returns to an idealized past and rejects the advances of modern technology, medicine and education. Their ideology does not provide a vision of the future that most modern Muslims want and "lacks specifics about the most fundamental questions of governance, such as how political decisions would be made, how the state should be structured, and how fundamental public needs such as security would be met."²⁷

The "Arab Awakening" movement, therefore, presents both an opportunity and a challenge for the people of the Middle East. They are in a struggle to define how they want to be governed, and to form a system of government that respects the values and institutions of Islam, while embracing modernity and individual human rights. Applied more broadly, this struggle has implications beyond the Arab world to include South Asia and Muslims everywhere.

Framing the Problem

Herein lays the problem. “Western powers have not come out in support of liberal and secular forces in the [Middle East], instead preferring to watch from the side-lines and focus on realpolitik.”²⁸ Nor has the West, led by the United States, made efforts to effectively challenge the violent extremist ideology or support those indigenous voices that make the effort. As one counterterrorism scholar noted, “Whatever the explanation, it is clear to most informed observers that the United States has so far failed to conduct anything approaching an effective counterideological [sic] campaign against al-Qaida.”²⁹ He comes to this conclusion despite the United States issuing a counterterrorism strategy that states a counter-ideological effort as one of its primary pillars.

The *U.S. National Strategy for Counterterrorism* provides as its desired end the disruption, dismantling and eventual defeat of “al-Qaida and its affiliates and adherents to ensure the security of our citizens and interests.”³⁰ It outlines the importance of observing American fundamental values and offers eight overarching goals:

- Protect the American people, homeland, and American interests.
- Disrupt, degrade, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaida and its affiliates and adherents.
- Prevent terrorist development, acquisition, and use of weapons of mass destruction.
- Eliminate safe havens.
- Build enduring counterterrorism partnerships and capabilities.
- Degrade links between al-Qaida and its affiliates and adherents.

- Counter al-Qaida ideology and its resonance and diminish the specific drivers of violence that al-Qaida exploits.
- Deprive terrorists of their enabling means.³¹

Unfortunately, to date, policymakers have focused almost exclusively on the lethal aspects of U.S. counterterrorism strategy by targeting extremist leadership. In large part, this is due to the organizational structure of the U.S. Government itself. The intelligence agencies and Defense Department have very robust capabilities with adept operatives, coherent strategies and large investments focused on the killing or capture of extremist leaders. Conversely however, the U.S. Government completely lacks a strategic influence arm with the statutory authorities to plan and synchronize the non-lethal efforts across departments and agencies. Further undermining the balanced, whole-of-government approach is the complete lack of a national influence strategy to guide non-lethal activities and operations to counter the extremist ideology.³²

As a result, the United States has found itself in a dilemma sometimes described as “digging in loose sand,” where every scoop of the shovel is immediately filled in by more sand; such has been the American effort to kill or capture violent extremist leadership, only to find them quickly replaced and the process started over again. Recognition of this shortcoming prompted even the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command to state in testimony before Congress, “Enduring success is achieved by proper application of indirect operations, with an emphasis in building partner-nation capacity and mitigating the conditions that make populations susceptible to extremist ideologies.”³³

This is the crux of the issue; the United States and its allies must counter the extremist Salafi ideology as this is the center of gravity of the entire social movement. Their ideology is that “source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act (emphasis added)”.³⁴ Further analysis of the center of gravity will occur further in the paper; suffice to say that regrettably, State Department-led public diplomacy is the principal strategic influence tool available with limited assistance from the Defense Department or the intelligence agencies, particularly outside combat theaters.

The inadequacy of U.S. public diplomacy as a way to counter violent extremism has been widely studied and commented upon by a number of experts. Media efforts such as Al-Hurra TV and Radio Sawa are intended to provide information, but have failed to gather significant audiences and do not deliver an influential counter-narrative to extremist doctrine. Furthermore, public diplomacy efforts to support moderate or liberally inclined groups have not amounted to much.³⁵ As one scholarly report states,

U.S. public diplomacy toward the Muslim world includes 11 main projects with a total budget of roughly \$400 million. They divide into five media projects; three international exchange programs; a group of micro-programs to support pluralism, prosperity and gender equity; language-training programs; and the overseas work of ambassadors and other State Department officials. Some of these efforts are successes, others are dismal failures. International exchanges and language training earn especially good marks, while U.S. media efforts deserve very poor ones. The most successful programs are far too small to have much beneficial impact. Thus, current U.S. efforts to shape opinion in the Arab/Muslim world are largely ineffective due to either poor execution or inadequate funding.³⁶

Clearly, American public diplomacy efforts require better synchronization, funding and execution, and despite legislative efforts such as the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act, and Presidential issuance of a *National Strategy for*

Strategic Communication, its significance as an instrument of national power has still failed to materialize. This is in part due to a State Department culture that is overly bureaucratic and fails to understand how to use public diplomacy to influence foreign audiences.³⁷ This is evident in that public diplomacy officers are not trained in methodologies to counter violent extremist ideology. The premise of public diplomacy is to build foreign goodwill toward the United States through the dissemination of truthful information that promotes American values, and through English-language training programs. Public diplomacy officers neither actively influence nor counter Salafi ideology nor are these officials engaged in building foreign networks to oppose the extremist narrative. Thus, even with better efficiency and more funding, public diplomacy activities would still fail to counter Salafi extremist ideology.³⁸

Consequently, while the U.S. government has made great strides toward dismantling the leadership of Al-Qaeda, it has not achieved a balanced, whole-of-government approach for an enduring solution against violent extremism in the Middle East. Counterterrorism scholars have offered U.S. policymakers several recommendations to address this shortcoming. Some advocate building the national police and intelligence capabilities of partner states as the best means of dismantling the violent extremist networks within the effected countries. Basically, this is a decapitation strategy that uses indigenous security forces with their proximity and access to the population to find the “hubs” of extremist leadership and financiers for kill or capture.³⁹ Other scholars suggest the U.S. Government implement a policy of building moderate Muslim networks focused on “three broad sectors within the spectrum of ideological tendencies in the Muslim world where the United States and the West can

find partners in the effort to combat Islamist extremism: secularists; liberal Muslims; and moderate traditionalists, including Sufis”, a sect of Islam associated with mysticism.⁴⁰

Both recommendations have merit, in terms of building partner capacity and supporting indigenous networks that ideologically oppose the extremists and can compete for influence over the unengaged Muslim masses. And both approaches have had some degree of support within the U.S. Government, particularly the former with the U.S. Special Operations community. Nevertheless, both approaches by themselves are insufficient to secure a decisive, enduring result because they fail to “counter the virulence of the ideological message which produces the lifeblood of the jihadist movement, its foot soldiers.”⁴¹ In other words, both approaches must be conducted with the addition of an active strategic influence effort – overtly, clandestinely and covertly – that would amplify a competing narrative and worldview, de-legitimize the violent extremist ideology, and sow seeds of doubt, mistrust and division within the extremist organizations themselves. Only then will this violent social movement lose its ability to radicalize and recruit new converts, and replace its losses due to attrition.

Strategic Approach

U.S. counterterrorism strategy has lacked an associated strategic influence strategy to support it. The remainder of this paper will suggest a framework for just such a strategy, beginning with an analysis of the enemy’s center of gravity -- the ideology. Amongst many scholars and counterterrorism practitioners, “there is a growing consensus that countering the ideology that drives this extremism is a critical element in the overall effort to prevent extremist acts of violence.”⁴² What is apparent is that the ideology “provides the moral strength and will to act” across the broad social movement. It is these beliefs and common worldview that radicalizes new converts and binds

together diverse individuals from London to Morocco to South Asia to achieve a common goal.

For strategists, the significance of identifying the enemy's center of gravity is that it provides a focal point for further analysis of those critical capabilities that support the center of gravity and from them, the critical requirements and vulnerabilities which can be attacked or exploited.⁴³ In this case, the critical capability is the network of likeminded individuals, which in some cases have formed franchise groups to the extremist social movement. This network provides the supporting web that espouses doctrine and refutes opposition; provides emotional support and generates financing; and shares all kinds of information from technical bomb making to ardent martyrdom messages. And finally, the network gives life to the social movement by giving extremist adherents the sense of a collective identity greater than themselves.⁴⁴

From the ideology, three critical requirements emerge that enable the critical capability -- the network -- to function: (1) credible key communicators that provide doctrinal foundation and intellectual inspiration; (2) modern communications technology, particularly "new media" such as social media websites, video-posting and mass text messaging that enables interactive engagement and creates a participatory experience that strengthens bonds and helps mobilize; and (3) the perceived legitimacy of the doctrine itself, in that it is viewed as accurately describing current conditions and providing a viable alternative to the present state.⁴⁵ Further analysis of these critical requirements identifies two critical vulnerabilities: the credibility of the communicator and the legitimacy of the doctrine or ideology itself. This examination enables

understanding of the subsequent influence model in that the framework provides the ways to attack and erode these vulnerabilities toward an enduring strategic effect.

Figure 1 below depicts a standard bell curve representing a hypothetical population affected by violent Salafi extremism.

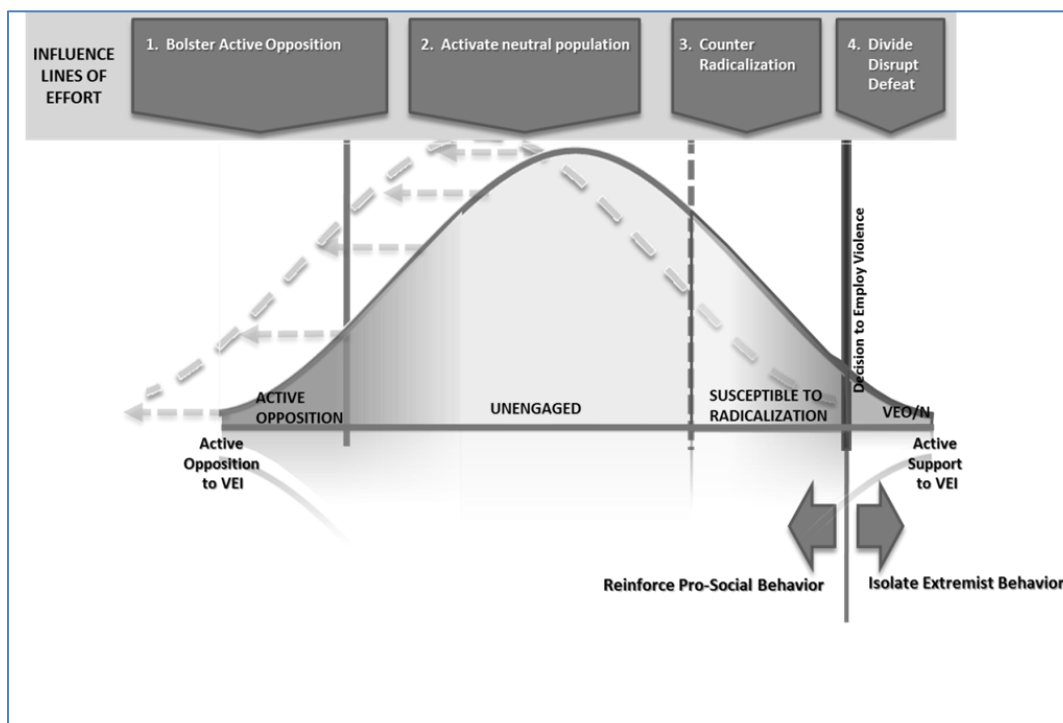


Figure 1

The preceding analysis suggests that within these populations, generally speaking, four segments emerge: (1) the violent extremist (on the far right of the graphic) who knowingly and willingly cross the line to support or commit violence; (2) those actively opposed to violent extremism (on the far left); (3) the vast majority of the population in the middle that, for the most part, are unengaged in the ideological struggle; and (4) a sub-segment of the unengaged that, because of a sense of disenfranchisement, are susceptible to radicalization. Each of these segments has unique characteristics and therefore constitutes different audiences whose attitudes, perceptions and behaviors

are subject to influence. Across the top of the graphic are influence lines of effort, meaning they constitute any number of activities whose logic and purpose are to influence that audience segment to achieve an objective. Ultimately, the basic goal of this model is to shift the population curve to the left, away from the extremists by activating the unengaged and swelling the ranks of those in active opposition to violent extremism.

To conceptually illustrate through a simplified historical analogy, one can look at the American Civil Rights Movement versus the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) as an example. The Klan, whose ideology of racism broadly appealed within the United States, once had membership in the millions and used extremist violence as a method of terror. However, those calling for equal civil rights eventually developed a competing social movement. This movement provided a counter-narrative to racism. Its key communicators and competing network activated the unengaged, slowly pulling the curve to the left, so that today racism is no longer acceptable in mainstream American society, the KKK is a marginalized fringe group, and terrorizing racial violence rare.

Application of this framework suggests a way to combat violent extremists is through the development of a competing social movement and associated networks, supported by influence activities directed toward each specific audience segment. Figure 2, below, provides an expansion of the model. It is important to note that the power of the influence activities comes from the fact that they are, first and foremost, indigenous.

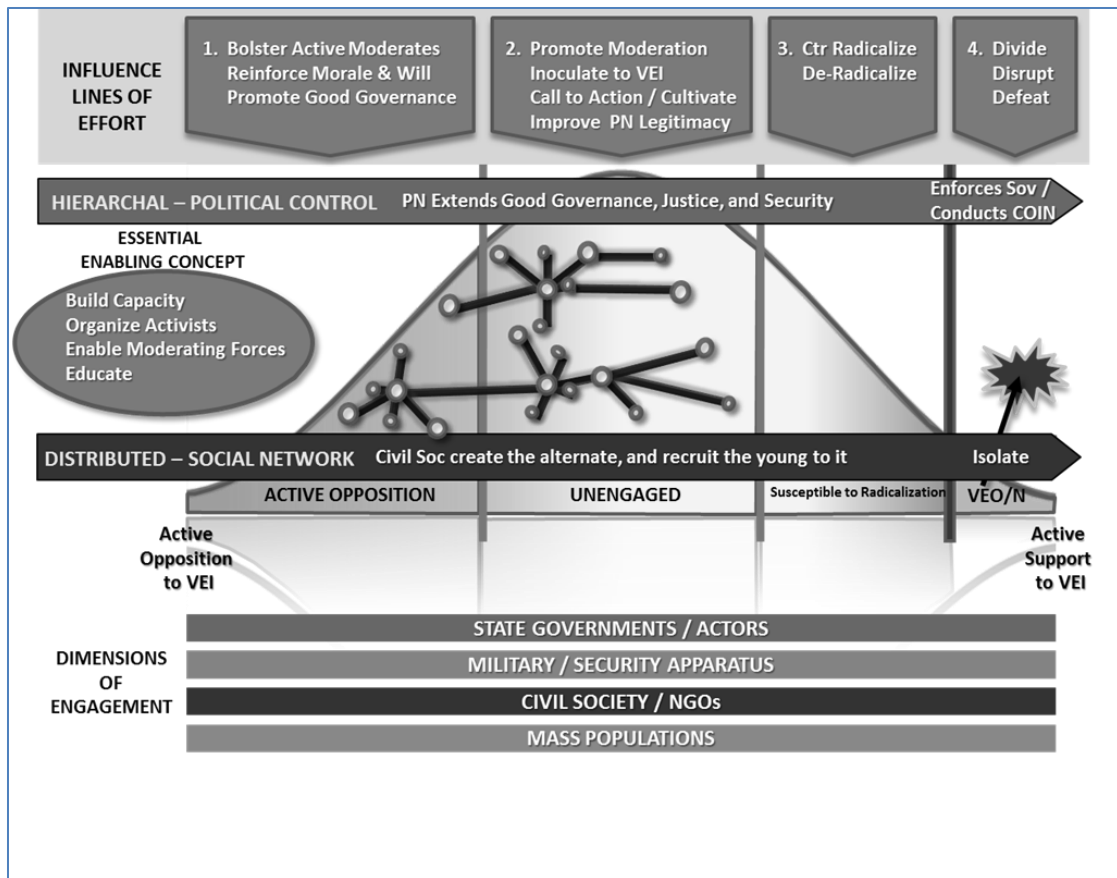


Figure 2

This framework is not suggesting a super-empowered traditional public diplomacy effort with a “louder U.S. voice.” The strength of the influence effort is in its genuineness as a competing social movement whose leaders and key communicators are indigenous to the affected societies and who offer a competing, viable future state and aspiring worldview. The United States, therefore, plays a supporting role by, with and through the indigenous allies. Furthermore, the American role would differ depending on which audience segment was being supported or targeted. Each audience segment and dimension of engagement requires different types of support, and therefore multiple U.S. Government departments and agencies are required across the spectrum of overt, clandestine and covert activities. Consequently, the lead

department or agency would differ depending on authorities, capabilities and intended objectives for each respective line of effort.

Influence Line of Effort (LOE) 1, on the far left of the model supports the segment of the population already in active opposition to the violent extremists. They are the indigenous natural allies (INA) of the United States, even though they may be highly critical of American policies. In fact, their criticism of the United States may actually strengthen their credibility with the unengaged Muslim masses. What is most important, however, is that they actively oppose the Salafi extremists. These individuals and groups will differ by society, and therefore the help of the U.S. diplomatic, development and intelligence communities is needed in identifying potential leaders and key communicators. The study, *Building Moderate Muslim Networks*, by Angel Rebas and his colleagues serves as a foundational guide to the influence framework offered in this paper, and provides a methodology for assessment and engagement of this audience segment.⁴⁶ The study states,

Moderate network building can proceed at three levels: (1) bolstering existing networks; (2) identifying potential networks and promoting their inception and growth; and (3) contributing to the underlying conditions of pluralism and tolerance that are favorable to the growth of these networks.⁴⁷

These principles are central to the influence LOE 1, but will vary in execution from society to society. One way it will vary is in the level of overt American involvement with these INA groups. Overt involvement may undermine the legitimacy and credibility of these groups and may cause them to appear as American puppets in the minds of the unengaged population. Therefore, careful assessment of the individual, group and dimension of engagement is required as the United States seeks to organize and build the capacity of these indigenous natural allies.

The Rabasa study suggests several demographic groups as potential partners: liberal and secular Muslim academics, moderate religious scholars, and community activists, women's groups engaged in gender equality campaigns, journalists and indigenous media organizations.⁴⁸ Other potential partners include indigenous business leaders seeking better access to global markets, foreign investment and stable financial transactions; and those in the arts communities whose abilities for artistic expression may be suppressed in a society dominated by harsh extremist mores.

Several aspects are critical in this influence line of effort. First, that the indigenous natural allies provide a contrasting ideology and viable alternative future from the extremists. Second, that the INA, directly or indirectly, communicate a message that erodes the legitimacy of the extremist ideology, and where possible, the credibility of extremist key communicators. Finally, that the INA network amplify this message (with or without American support) using all means of mass communication feasible to the unengaged segment of the population.

This paper differs from the Rabasa study in the belief that these efforts to build moderate networks are alone sufficient to effectively combat violent extremism. The building and organization of moderate networks is foundational to the framework, but must be supported by influence activities along Influence Lines of Effort 2, 3 and 4.

The activities of Influence Line of Effort 2 are done in support of LOE 1 in their outreach toward the unengaged segment of the population. The indigenous natural allies of LOE 1 broadcast and amplify their message with the intended effects of building civil society and social discourse, promoting moderation, and inoculation of the unengaged to the violent extremist ideology. INA key communicators must provide a

compelling future vision and activists on the ground must develop the associations and communication links into the unengaged masses. Inoculation occurs when moderate key communicators highlight the internal contradictions and inconsistencies of the violent extremist message and worldview. Ridicule could play a powerful role to this end, as those contradictions are not only amplified, but mocked for their flaws in logic.⁴⁹ They introduce the questions of how an ideology that espouses the simplicity of an idealized distant past can reconcile with the advances of the modern world, which few, including apparently the extremists themselves, would be willing to give up; and how can an interpretation of Islam that is more repressive and stifling reconcile with the desire of the Muslim masses to have more freedom of expression, not less? Finally, LOE 2 must enable a call to action in order to start the momentum toward activating the unengaged. This effort must begin small, with propagation of the message that leads to increased recruitment and social involvement. Where possible, it should include more cooperation with local civil authorities – “tips lines” for instance, that connect the population to indigenous security forces in action against the extremists.

Over time, this momentum will grow, just as the American Civil Rights Movement grew. And much like the American historical case, this will place pressure on political leadership to take more aggressive action against the violent extremists. Slowly, tolerance of the extremist message within social discourse will decrease, just as the message of racism is no longer tolerable in American society today.

Influence Line of Effort 3 builds on the previous two lines, but focuses more specifically on those susceptible to radicalization because of their disenfranchisement from the society. In many cases, this may include orphaned children and petty criminals,

who because of youthful indiscretions may no longer have opportunities for social integration. In this case, the United States could support indigenous efforts to build on lessons learned from counter-radicalization programs in other countries that have instituted vocational training programs and religious education programs advocating a more moderate interpretation of Islam.⁵⁰

Finally, the activities of Influence Line of Effort 4 are targeted against the violent extremists themselves. The intention here is not to reform or persuade them to change course. In most cases, this may be impossible for the ideologically committed. What is possible however, are activities that cause internal dissension, division and ideally, internally directed violence. This LOE implies clandestine and covert activities that highlight the hypocrisies of the extremist movement leaders, questions their legitimacy as ideological advocates, and once again introduces ridicule of the internal contradictions. If this is made to seem as coming from within, the trust and bonds of the extremist network will begin to fray, leaving them more and more isolated, less capable to draw financing and support, and more susceptible to kill/capture by indigenous security forces.

Recommendations

U.S. policymakers must alter the approach they have taken toward counterterrorism to truly support a balanced, all-of-government effort. It must be an approach that incorporates both the targeting of the enemy's networks and the building of moderate competing networks, fully supported by strategic influence activities. As the adage states, "it takes a network to defeat a network," therefore these activities must amplify the competing narrative of our indigenous natural allies; facilitate the INAs linkages with each other and to the unengaged populations. Simultaneously, American

and partnered efforts must include clandestine and covert activities that erode the legitimacy of extremist ideology, diminish its appeal to those susceptible to radicalization, and causes internal damage to the extremist organizations themselves.

As a suggested way ahead, there are four items to note: (1) This will take time. Competing social movements are not built overnight. (2) It will require some restructuring within the U.S. Government. This step includes possibly creating a post within the White House or National Security Staff with cabinet-level access to synchronize and secure the decisions of the Department and Agency leaders. Furthermore, the creation of a Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) – Influence should be considered. This JIATF would take the capabilities, authorities and personnel of the various Departments and Agencies into account for synchronization of effort and establishment of priorities. (3) Successful execution of these activities will require methods to measure performance and measure effects in order to assess and adjust efforts. (4) It will require the reallocation of financial resources.

Conclusion

Our enemy is first and foremost an idea that resides in the cognitive domain of our adversaries as they struggle to shape the perceptions and behaviors of the Muslim masses. Our adversaries recognized this long ago and are conducting activities to influence those masses centered on the power of their ideology and enabled by their network. Some U.S. policymakers, such as former Defense Secretary Gates mentioned at the opening of this paper, have recognized where the true battle resides. Unfortunately, by want of American direct nature for quick results, the United States is too hasty to apply force of arms in an attempt to solve the problem. It is a hammer that continues to view every problem as a nail, and by so doing, the United States continues

to empower the very beast it is trying to defeat; instigating resentment; reinforcing the extremist narrative, and alienating governments that would otherwise align themselves against a commonly perceived threat. The United States must change course and this paper suggests a vector on which to proceed.

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